

CHAPTER VI

MEMORY, HABIT, AND IMITATION

WE have grouped Memory, Habit, and Imitation together because they are all *repetitive influences* — influences which may perhaps be ascribed to a tendency of living tissue to repeat the results of impulses. Memory is the repetition of mental or nervous experiences; Habit, the repetition of mental or muscular action; Imitation, the repetition of mental impressions in mental or muscular action. The physical world around us is pervaded by the rhythmical repetitions, or vibrations, of light and sound; and memory, habit, and imitation appear to have more in common with Matter than with the spontaneous irregularity which is the chiefest characteristic of Life. Many of the nervous reactions of living creatures display a sympathy with rhythm: such are the regular pulsations of the jelly-fish (Medusa), the timed movements that synchronously agitate swarms of insects, and the human accomplishments of music, poetry, and dancing. But neither memory nor habit, so far as we can judge, is an influence of paramount importance in the inferior classes of the animal kingdom. Here the processes of directive instinct maintain the regularity of life. Higher up the scale, memory and habit become controlling forces; they are but infinitely less so than the almost inevitable regularity which they displace. Imitation, on the

